



2003 SENIOR CITIZEN REPORT

Important Property Tax and Prescription Drug Information for Seniors



State Representative

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10th District

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Committees:

- Health Care, Assistant Ranking Republican
- Children and Family Services
- Transportation

Dear Friends

I'm sending you this newsletter to address a couple of very important issues to 10th District senior citizens. Both have big impacts on your pocket book and quality of life. I hope to provide useful information that may well result in some immediate financial relief for you.

It's **property tax** time again. As homeowners prepare to pay their taxes for the first half of the year, we're reminded of the burden placed on many seniors, especially those on fixed incomes.

I know it presents a serious problem when homeowners' taxes rise faster than their income. For this reason, I hope next session will bring the opportunity to vote on legislation that would further ease the property tax burden for seniors. This year, House Republicans introduced House Bill 1029 to help achieve this goal, but it never came to the floor for a vote.

The good news now is that the Legislature has adopted tax breaks for seniors in the past. If you qualify and are not already taking advantage of this tax relief, read on as I've provided detailed information that may help you.

Lawmakers made a small step in the right direction by passing **prescription drug** legislation this year designed to save the state money when it purchases medications for people who rely on government funded health coverage. It's disappointing, however, that House Republicans' push for true senior prescription drug assistance — that would have done more to help seniors get the medicine they need but can't afford with a true benefit — was halted.

Because the new law will take some time to go into effect and may not provide immediate benefits to all, I offer some alternatives in this newsletter that may well save you money on your prescription drugs right now.

As always I welcome your questions and concerns regarding legislative issues and questions and concerns of particular importance to you. I'm also happy to assist you in your dealings with state government. My job is to serve you, as well as represent you, so please contact me at the phone number and email listed in this communication if I can help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Barbara Bailey".

Barbara Bailey
State Representative

ARE YOU GETTING THE PROPERTY TAX BREAKS YOU DESERVE?

As your state representative, I continually strive to make the taxes we all pay work harder. Fiscal responsibility is first and foremost in my mind as I introduce legislation and vote on bills. I'm pleased we succeeded in balancing our state budget without raising new general fund taxes.

But I'm always concerned when I hear from my constituents that their property taxes are so high they can't afford to stay in their homes. Or, their taxes are eating up a far too large portion of their fixed incomes. I hope the following information provides information you can use right now to ease your tax burden. Did you know you may qualify for property tax exemptions if you meet all of the following criteria?

- You are at least 61 years of age or disabled.
- You own and live in a single-family home, mobile home, or condominium.
- You have a combined household income not exceeding \$30,000.

Expenses for some nursing or home health care and some medications may be deducted when calculating your income. You also can remain eligible for tax breaks if your home is rented while you're in the hospital or nursing home.

Valuation limit

Qualifying citizens are entitled to property tax exemptions on their principal residence and up to one acre of land. The value of the residence is frozen at its value on Jan. 1 of the year in which you first qualify for the program.

Exemption schedule

You are eligible for the following exemptions if your combined household income falls within the range indicated.

Income

\$24,001 to \$30,000

\$18,001 to \$24,000

\$18,000 or less

Exemption

All excess levies (*special school levies are an example of excess levies*).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$40,000 or 35% of assessed valuation (\$60,000 max.).

All excess levies and regular levies on the greater of \$50,000 or 60% of assessed valuation.

PROPERTY TAX DEFERRALS

If you are 60 years of age or retired because of physical disability, and your disposable income is \$34,000 or less, you may qualify for property tax deferrals. The state allows property tax deferrals on up to 80 percent of the equity in your home. The deferral program applies to your principal residence and up to five acres, if zoning requires a larger parcel size.



Under this program, you pay no property tax until the home is sold. The state pays the deferred taxes, and in exchange, receives a lien against the property equal to the amount of owed taxes plus 8 percent. Total taxes are collected when the property is sold or passed on.

HOW TO APPLY FOR PROPERTY TAX BREAKS

For more information on both property tax exemptions and deferrals, call your county assessor:

Skagit County Assessor 360-336-9370
Snohomish County Assessor 425-388-3540
Island County Assessor – from Coupeville 360-678-5111
from S. Whidbey 360-321-5111
from Camano 360-629-4522

Or you can obtain more information about our state's property tax laws by calling the Washington State Department of Revenue toll-free at 1-800-647-7706.

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PRESCRIPTION DRUG PROGRAMS FOR SENIORS

As your state representative, I'm troubled by the fact that we have yet to provide our seniors with relief now on the cost of prescription drugs. My priorities coming into office included health care, education and transportation. I'm pleased to be serving as Assistant Ranking Republican on the House Health Care Committee and tackling issues of real importance to seniors in this way.

While we passed a law this year that is designed to save the state money when it purchases medications for people who rely on government funded health coverage, it's not what I and other House Republicans tried to pass — a true senior prescription drug assistance that would have done more to help seniors get the medicine they need but can't afford with a true benefit.

What Senate Bill 6088 is intended to do is help control state expenditures on prescription drugs and may also give some consumers access to lower cost medications. The new law creates an information clearinghouse for prescription drug assistance programs as well as prescription drug education programs aimed at helping seniors save money. The state will also seek federal authority to operate a prescription drug assistance program for seniors and attempt to negotiate prescription discounts for some seniors and the disabled.

While we wait for the benefits of our new state law to take effect and for the federal government to create a federal prescription drug benefit through Medicare, there is more we can do on this front. I want to provide what might be useful resources and advice right now. Please consider the programs listed below.

We all know how important prescription drugs can be to our quality of life. New, excellent medications are often the key to maintaining our health. I want to make sure that seniors who need and have come to rely on them can get them.

Nine drug companies have announced voluntary discount programs for Medicare-eligible patients with low to moderate incomes. Eligible Subscribers to these programs can receive brand-name prescriptions at a 20 to 40 percent discount or with affordable co-pays of just \$12 to \$15.

Toll-free phone numbers are provided below, so you can find out if you qualify or want to learn more about these programs:

- **GlaxoSmithKline – Orange Card**
Phone: 1-888-ORANGE6 (888-672-6436)
- **Novartis – CareCard**
Phone: 1-866-974-CARE (866-974-2273)
- **Pfizer – Share Card**
Phone: 1-800-717-6005
- **Lilly – LillyAnswers Card**
Phone: 1-877-RX-LILLY (887-795-4559)
- **Together Rx (Abbott Laboratories, AstraZeneca, Aventis, Bristol-Myers Squibb, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson and Novartis.)**
Phone: 1-800-865-7211



From personal experience, I also strongly encourage you to SHOP AROUND for your prescription drugs. The same medication can cost significantly less depending on where you purchase it, whether at Costco, a local pharmacy or across the border in Canada, or whether you ask for the generic equivalent.

You might make a list and visit your pharmacist to ask whether there are any duplicative or counteractive medications on this list, or whether there are any cheaper alternatives to what you're taking.

Remember too that our veterans get a much deserved break on the price of their medications with government-sponsored health insurance. For more details or information about eligibility requirements for veteran prescription drug benefits, call TRICARE's toll-free helpline at: 1-877-DOD-MEDS (877-363-6337).

If you can't make these inquiries yourself, there are agencies in our local communities that will help. Please refer to the comprehensive list of senior services and the phone numbers provided in this newsletter. For example, representatives from the Northwest Regional County on Aging or the Senior Services office in your county are equipped to help with this sort of thing.

Programs do exist now that could be of help to you while we continue working on legislative solutions for the dilemma that exists for many because of the high price of prescription drugs.

State Representative
10th Legislative District

BARBARA BAILEY

SENIOR PRESCRIPTION DRUG TOWN HALLS — *YOU'RE INVITED*

Seniors from the South Whidbey, Oak Harbor, Stanwood and surrounding areas, please join me for a worthwhile session on prescription drug discount programs. The meetings will occur on Monday, November 10. Pharmaceutical representatives will be on hand to explain how the discount programs work and will be able to help you sign up. This way, seniors who qualify can begin saving money on reduced prescription drug prices immediately. Please plan to join your legislative team from the 10th District to discuss this important issue.

Monday, November 10

9 – 10:30 am at the **Bayview Senior Center** – 14594 SR 525 in Langley

12 – 1:30 pm at the **Oak Harbor Senior Center** – 51 SE Jerome St. in Oak Harbor

3:30 - 4:30 pm at the **Stanwood Senior Center** – 7430 276th St. NW in Stanwood

SENIOR SERVICES TELEPHONE NUMBERS- A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Skagit County

COPEs Personal Care Service 1-800-487-0416
Energy Assistance Program 1-360-416-7587
Senior Information and Assistance 1-360-336-9345
Skagit County Paratransit 1-360-757-4433
SHIBA Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisor 1-800-397-4422

Island County

Island County Health Department 1-360-679-7351
Blood Pressure Screening 1-360-221-8880
Energy Assistance and Weatherization 1-800-317-5427
Senior Services of Island County-Langley 1-360-321-1600
Meals on Wheels
Senior Services of Island County-North Whidbey 1-360-675-0311
Island Transit-North Whidbey 1-360-678-7771
Island Transit-South Whidbey 1-360-321-6688

Snohomish County

DART Dial A Ride 1-800-562-1381
Meals on Wheels 1-800-824-2183
Senior Information and Assistance-Camano Island ... 1-360-387-6201
Senior Services of Snohomish County 1-425-513-1900
Visiting Nurse Services of the Northwest 1-800-449-2221
Long-Term Care Ombudsman 1-800-562-6028

10th District

Northwest Regional Council on Aging 1-800-585-6749
Serving Skagit and Island Counties
Social Security 1-800-772-1213

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